

pike, David
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FBI Raids Scientologists, Charges Burglaries, Bugging

By David Pike

Washington Star Staff Writer

The Founding Church of Scientology over the last several years has infiltrated the Justice Department and the Internal Revenue Service, copied confidential government documents through break-ins and other means, and, in one case, bugged a high-level IRS meeting, the federal government has charged.

An affidavit filed this week in U.S. District Court — signed by an FBI agent and based on two weeks of "extensive interrogations" of a former top church official — was used to obtain a search warrant carried out by dozens of FBI agents early yesterday as they simultaneously invaded the church's office at 2125 S St. NW, and its national headquarters in Los Angeles.

THE SEARCH of the church's files for the copied federal documents was still continuing last night, but government sources indicated that the raids were meeting with some success. They said that the outcome will not be made public until the warrants are returned before U.S. Magistrate Henry Kennedy, who authorized the search.

The affidavit indicated that if the raids produce the expected evidence, federal prosecutors will bring charges of conspiracy, obstruction of justice and theft of government property against a number of church officials.

Greg Layton, director of public affairs for the church, said late yesterday: "We feel this is a retaliatory move by the FBI and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the lawsuits and persistence of the church in trying to gain its files from government agencies through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). . . . It is a breach of good faith on the U.S. Attorney's part."

Layton said the church currently has about 25 FOIA suits against various government agencies that have monitored the church's activities for a number of years. He noted that the church recently filed a \$750,000 damage suit here against the FBI, the Central Intelligence Agency and others, charging they have engaged

THE MAIN BASIS for the searches yesterday was information given the government by Michael Meisner, who said that until recently he was one of the top five national church leaders and supervisor of covert operations.

Meisner, according to the affidavit, decided June 20 to surrender voluntarily to government officials, who had sought him since last August in connection with an illegal entry into the U.S. Attorney's Office in the federal courthouse here. Gerald B. Wolfe, a former church member and IRS clerk-typist, pleaded guilty in that case in District Court here and was sentenced on June 10 by Judge Thomas A. Flannery to two years on probation and 100 hours of community work.

The affidavit said that Meisner surrendered to the government after escaping "house arrest" by church officials in Los Angeles, where he was gagged and handcuffed to prevent him from returning to Washington.

The affidavit said that Meisner, who has not been granted immunity for his cooperation and will plead to a felony charge, currently is being held in protective custody at his request because both he and federal officials fear for his safety.

Scientology doctrine "requires the church to attack and destroy its enemies . . . and those like Meisner who leave the church," the affidavit stated.

SCIENTOLOGY IS a nondenominational religion founded in the 1950s by former Washington science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard. It now has offices in the country and abroad, with headquarters in England. It is primarily noted for its counseling methods involving an "E-meter," which resembles a lie detector, to aid members in achieving self-fulfillment.

The church has become controversial for its tactics in recruiting members through what some consider to be hard-sell techniques. And some former members have charged that the church goes to extreme lengths to prevent its members from leaving the church.

According to the affidavit, the church's activities against the government began following an order issued by a church official in England in early 1974. It called for an "all-out attack" on the IRS, ranging from lawsuits to infiltration of the IRS staff by church members.

The plan, which was later broadened to include other agencies, the affidavit said, included planting a member as a clerk in the IRS, another as a secretary in the office of a lawyer in the tax division of the Justice Department and a third as an employee of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration.

THE ALLEGED INFILTRATORS used their access to government offices to steal dozens of documents concerning the church, duplicate them for the church's files here and in Los Angeles and then return the originals to the government files, the affidavit said.

In addition, Meisner told investigators that two church officials in November 1974 bugged an IRS conference room and eavesdropped on a meeting of high-level officials discussing the church and its claims for tax-exempt status, the affidavit said. Meisner told investigators he later saw a transcript made from the tape recording of that meeting, the affidavit said.

Because the church was operating world-wide, the affidavit said, church operatives also were interested in documents from Interpol, the international organization that serves as an information-trading channel for law enforcement agencies around the world. The affidavit said that the church's DEA employee was able to obtain documents that included reports written by the CIA in Ecuador and Bolivia concerning Interpol agents believed to be involved in drug dealing.

The theft of documents continued through 1975 and 1976, the affidavit said. A list attached to the affidavit cites documents dating back to 1958 and includes letters from various U.S. attorneys here to Justice Department superiors, a letter by then-Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger and State Department cables to embassies in London and Paris and various internal documents to and from